

Executive Summary

Alternative Activities

Mission:

To Utilize On-Campus Entertainment, Downtown Activities, and Greek Community Involvement to Curb High Risk Drinking

Presidential Leadership Academy
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High-risk drinking has become a problem not only at The Pennsylvania State University but at many universities where a “new culture of intoxication” involving the “strategic and hedonistic goal of achieving drunkenness” seems to be taking hold (Wells). Students see intoxication as a goal in itself, and this attitude may, in part, be attributed to a lack of effective alcohol-free entertainment options. Our proposal includes three key areas in which we believe improvements can be made: on-campus entertainment, downtown activities, and Greek community Involvement.

On-Campus Entertainment (LateNight):

In the late 1990s, Penn State was one of the first institutions in the country to offer late-night, alcohol-free activities. In its first years, LateNight featured musicians, comedians, magic shows, arts and crafts, dancing, games, and movies. University President Graham Spanier indicated that when LateNight activities were initially introduced, alcohol-related incidents among Penn State students decreased. However, over the past five years, attendance at LateNight has dropped dramatically (Figure 1). In September 2005, attendance topped 22,000 students; but in September 2009, fewer than 17,000 students took part in LateNight programming (LateNight Monthly Attendance Report).

This decrease in attendance may be due to the fact that students’ activity interests have changed since LateNight’s conception. In the most recent student survey, it was revealed that students prefer concerts, comedians, and movies to any other activity (Pulse Survey, 2007; Figure 2). These staples of LateNight garner interest and high attendance, but other attention-grabbing activities must be added to maximize interest and attendance among students. Because the activities that students deem “fun” are constantly evolving, LateNight activities should regularly be re-evaluated and modified in order to keep students interested. This could be accomplished by a committee of students and LateNight coordinators who assess activities offered at LateNight throughout the semester.

A few activities students may find attractive include “Club HUB,” a night club located in the HUB; events showcasing different cultures; gaming promos, where systems are available to try new video games; and name-brand activities, such as a Red Bull or Victoria Secret sponsored event. Offering new activities each week or each month is important because doing so will add novelty to the program. If LateNight is revamped and restructured to include continuous innovation, the program can once again reach a larger audience of students.

Downtown Activities:

On-campus, University-sponsored “dry” programs have the potential to reach many students, but in order to make a significant impact on changing the “culture of intoxication,” the downtown social scene must also be addressed. Since students spend much of their time on campus during the weekdays, they appreciate the opportunity to take part in activities downtown during their nights and weekends.

Apartment parties, house parties, and fraternity parties are a dominant source of weekend entertainment for both underage and of age students. These unsupervised venues have no serving restraints or social controls to regulate consumption of alcohol, and for the majority of underage students, these venues are the center of social activity. According to a 2010 Marietta College study, underage students were “found to drink heavier amounts [of alcohol] than the older students” (Smith). Alternative downtown social activities for underage students should be established in an attempt to curb high-risk drinking behavior. If fun, alcohol-free events are in place downtown, both underage and of age students would have the option to participate.

The proposed policy is to implement alcohol-free activities in bars and nightclubs downtown. There are two main goals to this proposal: to provide a desirable alternative to drinking, and to prevent drinking for a prolonged period of time while the students are in a bar or club.

Incentives could be calibrated in a way that allows the bar owners to make money while simultaneously providing a safe social environment for students. The policy can have numerous benefits for all parties involved. By bringing a new age group to the bars, the establishments are likely to see increased revenue. Bob Schmuff and Carl Yungman, owners of Generation Xtremes in Baltimore, Maryland, closed their over-21 establishments to open an under-21 club, saying “it was easier to run and more profitable to cater to teens.” An increased focus on bringing entertainment into the venues would allow owners to charge a cover for entrance, compensating for decreased alcohol sales. Establishments could also serve food and non-alcoholic beverages such as soda and bottled water to augment revenue.

Pat Fung, the owner of the Gingerbread Man, agrees that we must take action now in order to prevent high-risk drinking from taking place. Fung says he would be open to discussing the idea of holding dry nights for under-21-year-olds at the G-man, especially if doing so would result in decreased high-risk drinking.

Greek Community Involvement:

The Interfraternity Council (IFC) has acknowledged that the drinking culture at Penn State needs to change because the current state of affairs acts as a wedge between students and the State College community. Dan Cartwright, Vice President of the IFC, described the relationship between the Greek community and local residents as “hostile.” To address this issue, the IFC instituted a number of changes for the Spring 2010 semester. Cartwright indicated that the enforcement of a dry rush and the requirement for guest lists and door security at parties are part of a broader initiative to shift Greek life towards “values-based recruitment,” which emphasizes community service and leadership instead of the “party culture” that has become synonymous with Greek Life. According to Cartwright, the transition will take at least three years to complete as newer students replace the current leadership and less desirable traditions of Greek Life filter out. Cartwright also emphasized

that this approach needs time to work and that the school and community can aid the process by giving it a chance. If this “values-based” approach is successful in bringing about a change in Greek culture, it may, in turn, spur positive change in the campus culture as a whole.

According to Cartwright, recent meetings and round-table discussions between community and Greek leaders have opened up dialogue between the entrenched sides. The establishment of a permanent council would build on this early success, while simultaneously demonstrating a commitment from each side. This committee would provide a forum for each side to air its respective grievances before resentment escalates to calling the police or taking legal action. The scope of the group would reach beyond the issue of high-risk drinking, and could become a permanent fixture for “town and gown” relations to build upon.

The existing system of Community Service (CORE) could use improvement. Currently, fraternity-centered activities are emphasized over community-oriented activities; fraternities receive points for events that promote alcohol awareness or anti-hazing practices. Cartwright was receptive to the idea of shifting the focus towards participation in building mutually respectful relationships with others in the State College community. Cartwright indicated that incentives such as improvements/furnishings for the frat houses or permission to have a Wednesday evening social would be effective motivators.

If community relations between Greek organizations and State College residents continue to improve, an Adopt-a-Family program might be a great way to foster personal connections between college students and their neighbors. The Adopt-a-Family program would involve fraternities “adopting” one of their neighbors. Perhaps the fraternity would perform simple acts of charity for the family (i.e. cutting the grass, shoveling the walk, post-party clean-up, hosting a neighborhood barbeque, etc.), and in return, the family members would act as a conduit for fraternity-community relations. Perhaps, in time, such a program can expand to include multiple households or even a block of such families.

Additionally, the Greek community could help promote alcohol-free activities on-campus and downtown as a legitimate alternative to drinking. Incentives for taking part in and/or planning dry activities would be similar to community involvement incentives. Students concerned with the “cool” factor might be more inclined to participate if fraternities are a visible element of these dry on-campus and downtown activities.

Conclusion:

It is our belief that students will take part in more dry activities if steps are taken to improve on-campus entertainment, downtown activities, and Greek community involvement. We thank you for your time and hope that you will take our proposal into consideration; we strongly believe our policy has the potential to begin to change the “culture of intoxication” that exists on our campus.

Appendix:

Figure 1:

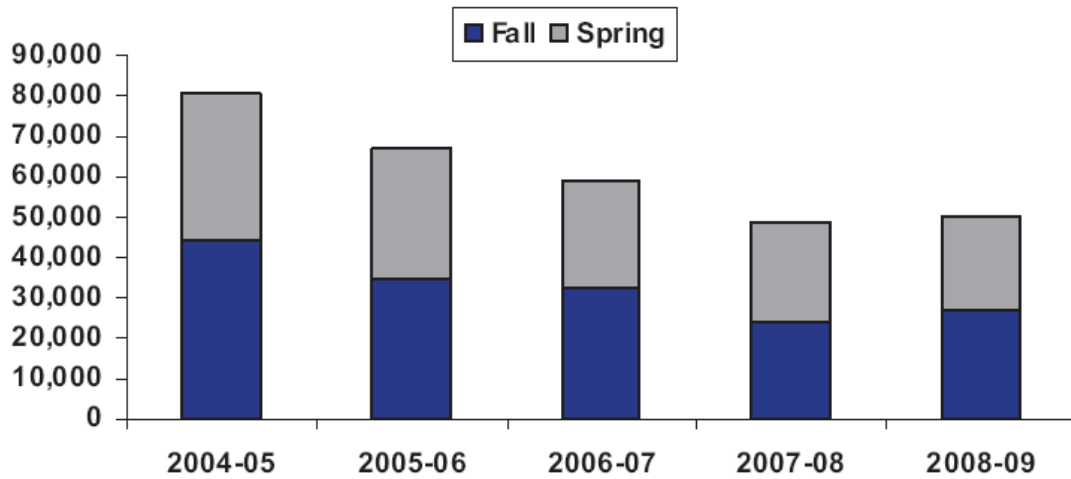


Figure 2:

Type of Event	Percent likely
Concert	84.1
Comedian	79.2
Movies	71.7
White Building activities	52.9
Programs sponsored by student organizations	40.9
Student performers on Joegies stage	27.6
Arts and crafts	19.4
Novelty acts	14.3

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